

*International Education: Why did the
Basques come to Idaho?*

The Idaho State Department of Education is dedicated to increasing the technical capability, social readiness, and global perspective of high school graduates in order that they will complete school with the character, skills, and knowledge to become responsible and productive citizens in their community, state, nation and world. The following lesson on the Basque Country integrates one of Clifton Taulbert's *Eight Habits of the Heart* "to incite your memory and passion so that you can employ your imagination in the building of good communities for the twenty-first century."

Taulbert, Clifton. (1997). *Eight Habits of the Heart*. New York, New York: Penguin Books.

*Expecting the best of others and praising their achievements
was not just the long ago practice of a small-town group of visionaries. It must be practiced
wherever we live, where we work, and where we play. Page 72*

For this lesson teachers should allow four days or more depending on which methods and extension activities are selected.

I. Content:

I want my students to understand:

- A. The diverse reasons that led Basques to immigrate to Idaho
- B. The value of collecting oral histories
- C. The process of collecting data to formulate conclusions about an area of study
- D. The high expectations set for individual Basque immigrants and their offspring led to the success of the Basque immigrants in Idaho

II. Prerequisites:

In order to fully appreciate this lesson the student must know:

- A. The reasons for the American westward movement
- B. The reasons for European immigration to this country in the late 1800's and early 1900's
- C. American attempts to limit immigration and the development of the Quota System

III. Instructional Objective:

Through an analysis of oral histories students will develop a database from which they will determine why Basques immigrated to Idaho and discover how high expectations impacted the successes they experienced here.

IV. Materials and Equipment:

Teacher: Access to a computer, computer lab, SMART Board, chalk board, overhead projector and appropriate writing utensils.

Teacher Handout #1: Sample database questionnaire

Teacher Handout # 2: Outline map of the Basque country

Teacher Handout #3: Outline map of Idaho

Teacher Handout #4: List of helpful websites

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Database software; completed database.

Teacher Handout #5: General Basque immigration information/fact sheet

Teacher Handout #6: Article about Basque immigration

Student: Access to computers, database system, SMART Board, overhead projector,
and appropriate writing utensils

Teacher Handouts 1-6 as determined by the instructor

A copy of the completed database

World atlas; Idaho map

V. Instructional Procedure:

Day One: (30 minutes)

1. Ask the class if they know any Basques or if any of them are related to any Basques. Make a web or chart on the board to illustrate the Basque connections in your school or community.
2. Explain that they will be creating a database about Basque immigration to Idaho in order to determine: A. Why the Basques came to Idaho? B. Why they thrived here? C. What role that high expectations had in their success?
3. Ask the students what questions they would ask in order to garner the information to answer these questions. The class might work as individuals, in small groups, or as a whole to create a **uniform** group of questions. **OR** introduce the sample questionnaire.
4. When a questionnaire has been agreed upon it should be reproduced and distributed to students. The teacher or some students should use the questionnaire as the basis for the database format and create the database so that students can enter their research as they complete the questionnaires.
5. Distribute general information (**Teacher Handouts #5 and #6**) on Basque immigration and assign as reading homework.
6. Create one large Idaho map and one large map of the Basque country for students to record the places that their research subject(s) emigrated from and where they immigrated to OR plan to give each student an Idaho and Basque country map.

Day Two:

1. Ask students if they have any responses to or questions about their assigned reading.
2. Explain to the class that oral histories give researchers an opportunity to explore in-depth the life of an individual person and how the events of a person's life intersect and are impacted by the events taking place in the greater society. Further explain, that historians can use an identifiable group of oral history subjects, such as Basque immigrants, to gain insights about the impact of historical events on a group and the impact of the group on historical events. Remind the students that they are going to undertake such an analysis and seek to answer the questions posed in Day 1 #2.

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3. At this point the teacher should assign one or more oral history subjects from the Basque oral history web site: www.basquemuseum.com/oralhistory to each student and distribute the agreed upon questionnaire forms and outline maps.
4. Students should go to the computer lab, read the oral history of their assigned person, and complete as much of the questionnaire as possible.
5. If you are having students fill out maps for their research subject, distribute them at this time.
6. Have the students write questions that they wished the interviewer had asked on the bottom of the questionnaire and have them tell why they wanted to know the information.
7. Ask the students to write a brief reaction to the life of their assigned immigrants at the bottom of the questionnaire or on a separate piece of paper.
8. Students should transfer the questionnaire response to the database; if only one student at a time can enter data, give the students some Basque websites to peruse.
9. If there are large Idaho and Basque country maps the student should post the departure and immigration points of the Basque immigrant on them.

Day Three:

1. Hold a class discussion in which students share their reactions to having read the personal stories of one or more Basque immigrants. Encourage students to reflect about the risks and challenges that the immigrants faced. Ask them to share their reflections about the level of expectations that the immigrants possessed as individuals and as a group. Ask them to reflect about the level of expectations that immigrants placed on their children.
2. If there are exchange students or recent immigrants in your class ask them if they would be willing to share the challenges that they are facing.
3. Ask the class whether or not the interviewer did a good job asking questions and if they could tell how the questions were posed.
4. Ask the class what they think about using oral histories of normal, everyday citizens to increase their understanding of history. Ask who they would want to interview from their own life experiences.
5. Distribute the composite database information to each student. Assign an essay in which each student analyzes the data as it pertains to the three over arching questions:
 - a. Why did the Basques come to Idaho?
 - b. Why did the Basques thrive here?
 - c. What role did high expectations play in their success?

Day Four:

1. In small groups have the students share their analysis of the database information:
 - a. Each group should choose a recorder who will keep track of conclusions that the group shares.
 - b. Each group should choose a spokesperson that will report the group's responses.

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- c. Then each group member should share his analysis with the group.
 - d. Next, each group should look together at the data for any conclusions about Basques in Idaho that are clear, but do not necessarily answer one of the three research questions.
 - e. Finally, each group member should take turns telling the group how closely his research subjects match the profiles and conclusions drawn from the data.
2. When the groups have finished their tasks, the spokespersons should take turns reporting to the class the group's findings.
 3. Lead the class in a discussion about their conclusions. Point out areas of general agreement. Point areas that are significantly different from others and try to determine what could account for those differences.
 4. Ask the students to evaluate the process as a method of historical research.
 5. Ask the students to evaluate this process as a way of studying history.

VI. Assessment/Evaluation:

- A. Essays: see Day Three
- B. Relevant test questions in unit exam
- C. Complete questionnaires, maps, suggested further questions, and reaction to their subjects' lives

VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:

- 9-12.US2.1.1.1 Analyze ways in which language, literature, the arts, traditions, beliefs, values and behavior patterns of diverse cultures have enriched American society. (498.01a)
- 9-12.US2.1.2.1 Identify motives for continued immigration to the United States. (495.01a)
- 9-12.US2.1.2.2 Analyze the changes in the political, social, and economic conditions of immigrant groups. (495.01b)
- 9-12.US2.1.2.3 Discuss the causes and effects of 20th century migration.
- 9-12.US2.2.1.1 Develop and interpret different kinds of maps, globes, graphs, charts, databases and models. (485.01a)
- 9-12.US2.5.1.2 Trace the major foreign policy positions that have characterized the United States' relations with the world in the 20th century.

VIII. Extension Activities:

- A. Have the students do further research about Basque boarding houses; create a boarding house dining area in your classroom. Have the class prepare a typical breakfast or lunch. Download Basque music to play during the meal. Have each student assume the character of the person whose oral history he read and share their life stories during the meal.
- B. Have students write to their oral history subject if that person is still living

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- C. Visit the Basque Museum and Basque block in Boise
- D. Invite local Basques in to share the history of their families
- E. Obtain a copy of West of the Basque, an Idaho Public Television special. Contact your local PBS station
- F. Create a local oral history project
- G. Have students interview people who they believe set high expectations for themselves and others
- H. Have students read about the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 and its impact on Basque immigration
- I. Have students research the role that Idaho Congressmen had in expanding the number of Basque immigrants to Idaho after WWII
- J. Have students research the lives of Jose Navarro and Antonio Azcuenaga, the first Basques in Idaho territory
- K. Hold a class discussion about the possibility of Basques entering the U.S. illegally
- L. Hold a discussion about the contributions that the Basques and other immigrant groups have made to the United States and ask the students to reflect about the current and historic anti-immigration movements throughout our history
- M. Have the students read about Basque arborglyphs, aspen tree carvings created by Basque sheepherders. (See **Teacher Handout #4** for websites.) Contact your local Forest Service office and see if a project is currently underway to catalogue the arborglyphs on the forest. Offer your students the opportunity to participate.

Teacher Handout 1

Sample Data Collection Sheet - Page One

1. Name of researcher: _____
2. Name of Immigrant: _____
3. Hometown and province in Basque Country: _____
4. Year of migration to U.S.: _____ to Idaho: _____
5. Sex: _____ Male _____ Female
6. Age at time of migration: _____
7. Marital status at time of migration: _____ Single _____ Engaged _____ Married
8. List of family members already in U.S./Idaho (include age and relationship):

9. The immigrant was sponsored by: _____ family member _____ employer _____ other
Explain: _____

10. Where in Idaho did the immigrant first live? _____
11. Did the immigrant ever live or work in a boarding house? _____ in what city?
_____ for how long? _____
12. What was the first employment of the immigrant? _____
13. List the career changes and choices made by the immigrant:

14. Once in Idaho, what educational experiences did the immigrant have?

15. List U.S. military participation of the immigrant or his offspring.

Teacher Handout 1

16. List Basque organizations or groups the immigrant joined.

17. List non-Basque organizations or groups the immigrant joined.

18. To what degree did the immigrant learn English? ____speak ____read ____write

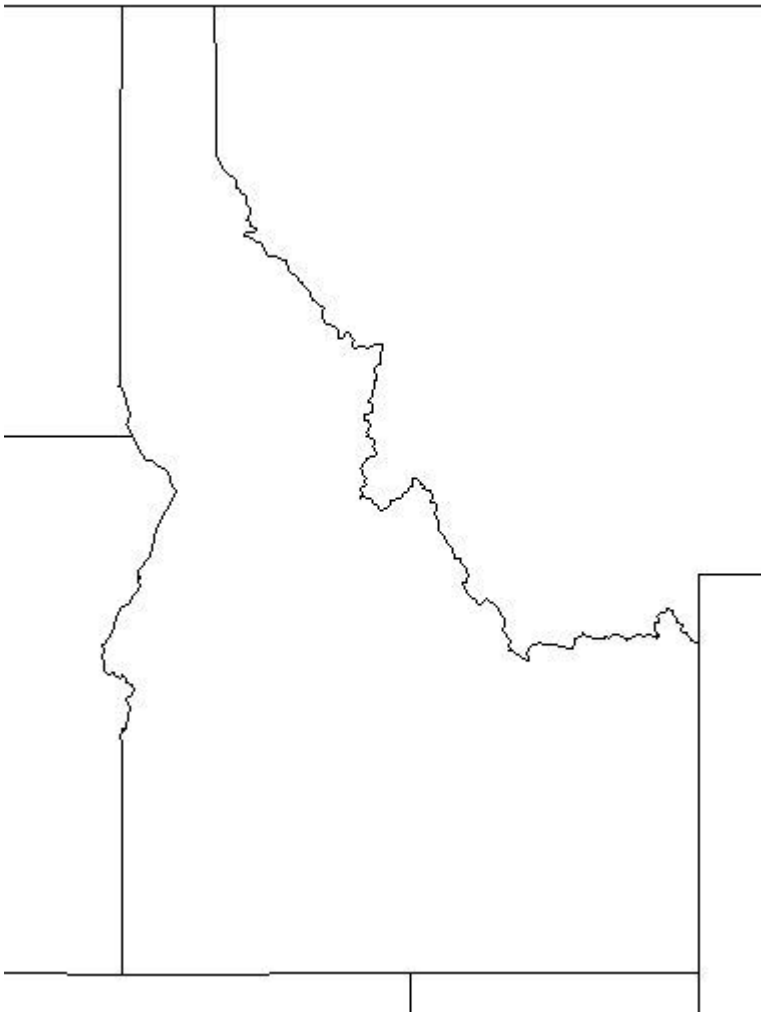
19. What educational experiences did the immigrant provide for his children?

20. List Basque and non-Basque cultural activities that the immigrant provided for his children.

Teacher Handout 2



Teacher Handout 3



LIST OF HELPFUL WEBSITES

General Basque

www.basquemuseum.com

www.basqueheritage.com

www.euroamericans.net/basque.htm

www.basque.unr.edu

Basque Boarding Houses

www.boisebasques.com

www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/ba/ba/.htm

www.nationaltrust.org/magazine/archives/arch_story/061005.htm

www.sde.state.id.us/instruct/docs/international/BasqueSheepherding.pdf

www.euskonews.com

Arborglyphs

www.basque.unr.edu/trees/

www.basque.unr.edu/09/9.3.43t/9.342.03.carvings.htm

www.passportintime.com/15-2/pastprojects/ppIdaho.htm

www.forestry.about.com/od/foresthstory1/a/argorglyph.htm

GENERAL INFORMATION/BACKGROUND

The following information comes from *An Enduring Legacy The Story of the Basques in Idaho* written by John Bieter and Mark Bieter University of Nevada Press 2000.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, when total immigration into the United States reached its peak of 8.8 million, the small Basque community forming in Idaho also expanded, and by 1910, 999 Basques were recorded in the total state population of 300,000. Most of the early Basque immigrants to Idaho were males under thirty, more than 96 percent of them from Bizkaia. More than three-quarters were single, and of those who were married, half had left their wives behind. They did not have much money (fifty-three Boise-bound Basques who arrived in New York between 1897 and 1902 brought an average of \$36.50) and were not well educated. In 1910 only 50.9 percent of the Basques in Idaho were able to read and write. P.30

Fellow Basques in the state helped ease this adjustment. By the turn of the century the small pocket of Basques in Boise and other towns in southern Idaho had begun to open rooming houses for the new immigrants, places where newcomers could find familiar language and pursue job possibilities. Other immigrants were fortunate enough to enter the country with the help of friends and relatives. Of fifty-three Basques headed for Boise from 1897 to 1902, almost half claimed to have relatives or acquaintances already living in the United States. P. 34

By the 1920's, however, the United States began to close the gates as the country responded to a growing fear of undesirable newcomers. A movement spread to exclude those immigrants "who bring least money to the country and who come most quickly upon public or private charity for support," an indirect reference to southern and eastern Europeans. Moreover, the theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer seemed to support the belief that mixing races and ethnic groups harmed the species. This, added to the xenophobia of World War I and the initial scares of the Red Scare, created an urgency to stem the tide of immigration. In 1921 the United States established its first immigration quota law. Only 3 percent of the number recorded for any nationality in the 1910 Census would be allowed to enter. The Spanish quota, which included Basques, was 912 immigrants per year. The Immigration Act of 1924 reduced the number of Spanish nationals allowed annually to just 131. The law ended Basques' large-scale entry into the American West—or at least their legal entry. P64, 65

BOARDING HOUSES

One of the most important institutions in the Basque-American experience, the boarding house, grew out of these needs. For young Basque immigrants along way from home, the boarding houses became "the village church, the town tavern, the bank and the health dispensary." The boarding houses allowed them to undertake their first forays into American culture and simultaneously form small Basque enclaves in towns throughout

Teacher Handout 5

Idaho, which served as “safe havens” of retreat from American society. Sheepherding helped Basques get settled in Idaho, but boarding houses helped keep them there.

The boarding houses originated as rooming houses in the 1890's, with established Basque families renting out a bedroom to a newly arrived immigrant. Young Basques had “barely a ticket to come to United States,” a Shoshone Basque said. “And then they were here and had no home. Where would they go? To hotel, when they didn't know anybody, they have no language?” They needed a place “where they got language. ... So (a Basque) that had one extra room took one in. Two extra rooms, two men. That's the way boarding houses started. It's a helping hand, that's what they were really, a helping hand.” P. 43

“Work, work, work—you know –work, work, work-that's all-work, work,” This was not a Basque shepherd's recollection of his life; it was the refrain of a Basque woman speaking of her average day as a sixteen-year-old boarding house maid. From the time boarding houses were built, they provided a means for hundreds of Basque women to immigrate to the United States. Before the boarding houses, the only female immigrants were wives or fiancées of Basque men who had established enough financial security to buy a house and start a business. The 1900 U.S. Census recorded only 5 Basque females in Idaho. But just as sheepherding offered a way for men to immigrate, the boarding houses began to pull young, single women from Bizkaia to work as domestics. Paralleling the men's experience, in many cases the women's plans to stay only temporarily were swept away by unanticipated events.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of Basque women to the boarding houses, and thus to the development of Idaho's Basque community. P. 49

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Those who stayed created choices and opportunities for the next generation. The second generation grew up as Basques at home and Americans in public. Their immigrant parents worked hard to give them even more possibilities and to instill in them good work habits and values that, when coupled with an education, provided a solid base for a successful life in the United States. Many climbed the social ladder to become managers, bankers, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. In the process they became more American. P.4

The children attended public schools in Cascade, encouraged by their parents to take full advantage. “There was one thing we understood from the beginning,” Julio (Bilbao) said. “The message was that education is the most important thing in the world, and if you're going to have opportunities, you've got to have an education. So it was just expected that we were going to go on to school.” P. 69

Although they themselves did not have the opportunity, the immigrant generation wanted their children to enjoy the advantages that a good education and the ability to speak English would bring. For the Basque children, as for other American-born children of immigrants, the school system was perhaps the single most Americanizing force. In

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many ways the children's first walks to school represented the Basques' first real steps into American society. P. 75, 76

After passing through the first grade, many second-generation Basques learned more English and American ways of behavior than most of their parents had learned after years in Idaho. All of them would have more formal education than their parents. In one study, the average schooling for foreign-born Basques was four years, while 12 percent had no formal schooling at all. By 1940, when only 30 percent of Idaho's population had a high school education, 73.7 percent of the second-generation Basques finished high school and 40 percent attended some college. P. 78

The first generation, in at least superficial aspects, adopted some characteristics that conformed to the American ideal. Despite the effects of the Depression and their flight from the declining sheep industry, almost 60 percent of first generation Basques owned their own homes before World War II. Their frugality allowed them to survive the roughest economic times, and they were rarely forced to borrow. From 1922 to 1947 only two Basque families sought assistance from the Boise City Welfare Department, and only ten Basques were included on Idaho's old-age assistance rolls. P. 84

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION: BASQUE IMMIGRATION

Ethnic Industries for Migrants: Basque Sheepherding in the American West

Gloria Totoricagüena Egurrola



Large scale Basque emigration to the United States has ceased and those new immigrants now entering the country are generally graduate students or well-educated professionals with artistic and corporate connections for employment. They leave a Basque Country with freely elected governments, and a European Union with relative economic stability. This was not always the case, and in fact, traditional Basque emigration to the United States at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s escaped what could be described as almost the opposite circumstances. Following the Carlist Wars of the 1830s and 1860s, economic stagnation and production decline, and political upheaval throughout, Basques experienced many factors pushing them out of their homelands. Access to information networks about possible economic opportunities and assistance was relatively easy to come by. Emigration out of the Basque Country was nothing new and was a common option. What were indeed new factors in the 1860s were the discovery of gold and silver in California, Nevada, Oregon and Idaho, and the possibility to move west by train across the United States, instead of traveling by boat around the American continent. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 facilitated the movement of people across the territories to the west, where public lands were utilized free of charge for grazing animals, and populating the towns was a priority.



American West. Jean Esponda's sheep carts. Big Horn, next to Buffalo. Wyoming at about 1926.

Though the first Basques to migrate to the United States did so after initially emigrating to Argentina and Chile, they traveled to California in the search for gold. However, though not all miners would find valuable minerals, they did need to eat everyday, and the agricultural business of producing foodstuffs grew tremendously. Basque immigrants turned their attention to raising cattle, and later to raising sheep. Pedro and Bernardo Altube (who had emigrated from Oñati, Gipuzkoa to Argentina, and from Argentina to California in the 1850s), became livestock barons of cattle when

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moved their livestock herds east and north into Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona. Once the railroad connected the east coast to the west coast, the safer, faster and cheaper travel enabled many more Basques to immigrate to the western United States after crossing the Pacific and landing in New York. Men began to send for their sons, brothers, and cousins and eventually wives, daughters and sisters. For the majority, the economic means to provide for their families were related to agriculture and the sheep industry.

The largest immigration of Basques with intentions to work in the sheep industry occurred between 1900-1930. The demand for lamb and wool was high, and the profit margin also high. Ranchers could graze their sheep free of charge on massive tracts of public lands and sheepherding in the United States became synonymous with itinerant grazing-moving herds constantly to new pastures and new regions where there were nutrients. In the High Desert this was often difficult, and sheepherders were required to move their herds every single day looking for feed as well as water. For the sheepherder, this lifestyle was extremely taxing and lonely.

Typically, a recently arrived Basque sheepherder worked for another already established Basque business and was paid annually. Many chose to have their pay in head of sheep rather than money, in order to begin their own herds, and an average band of sheep ranged in number from nearly two thousand animals to two thousand five hundred. This was not the sort of sheepherding any of these Basques might have been accustomed to, or had ever even seen. Many Basque sheepherders interviewed decades later still remember their fright at arriving to the United States and reaching their destinations, only to be taken to the mountains and left with supplies and a band of two thousand sheep, and then told, "See you in a month." Most were completely untrained and unprepared for the physical endurance needed to care for so many animals, and were certainly ill equipped to deal with the psychological and emotional loneliness of the range. During the winter months when the sheep were down in the

valleys and the men were in town, they stayed at the various Basque boarding houses reveling in euskera, Basque music and dance, receiving news from the Old Country, and hoping to meet Basque women. The boarding houses served many roles and filled needs for the sheepherders including as social, economic, ethnic identity maintenance, and information gathering environments.

Problems emerged between the itinerant sheepherders moving their bands constantly on public grazing lands, and the cattlemen doing the same. Cattlemen complained that the itinerant Basques allowed their sheep to overgraze the lands, ruining the chances for quick re-growth. The Idaho territorial legislature passed legislation preventing sheepherders from bringing their sheep within two miles of any cattle range or any human habitation. A 1917 State of Idaho Supreme Court case, *Omaechevarria v. State of Idaho* upheld the earlier law of separating the sheep and cattle, and the United States Supreme Court affirmed the decision to give preference to the cattle owners in prior occupancy



John Achabal, basque sheepherder at Boise, Idaho. He was the owner of 80,000 sheep and had 59 workers.

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buying property in the United States.



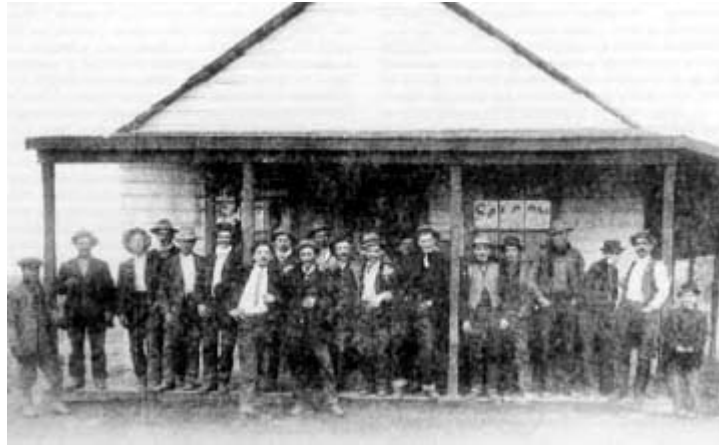
Basque shepherd. Montana.

In 1934, the United States Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act, which placed an additional 173 million acres of land into federally controlled grazing districts. The new requirements for grazing on these public lands included paying fees and following a specified schedule for all of those using the land, but most importantly it originated the requirement that all of those wishing to use the federal lands had to establish a base property which they privately owned, in order to be eligible for the public lands grazing rights. Land allocation was determined by government officials and cattle ranchers serving on advisory boards- which were keen to deny access to the itinerant Basque sheepman. Now, Basques who migrated to the American west in search of quick riches and profitable sheep grazing were faced with long-term investments of having to purchase land. The Immigration Act of 1924 (limiting the annual number of Spanish nationals that could enter the United States), the economic Depression beginning with the stock market crash in 1929, together with the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 curbed economic opportunities for Basques migrating to the United States, and though the flow from Euskal Herria decreased, it did not stop.

During and after the Second World War, there was an agricultural labor shortage in the United States and sheepherders were needed. Owners offered a contract guaranteeing the payment of the voyage in exchange for a commitment of three to five years of work with the same outfit. However, once the shepherd's debt was paid off they often left the business looking for other employment closer to the cities, in construction, in farming, and in any other field that allowed them a more fulfilling lifestyle. Senators from the western States passed legislation giving permanent residency to those Basques who had illegally entered the United States, in hopes of luring them back to the sheep industry. In 1950, the United States Senator from Nevada, Patrick McCarran, and the Congressional Representative of Nevada, Walter Baring, worked together to pass legislation known as the "Shepherd Bills". These laws brought about changes to immigration laws that allowed skilled laborers to enter the country if employers specified that this job could not be filled by anyone in the United States. Sheep industry employers argued that no one could perform the sheepherding tasks the way that the Basque had and could, and that they needed to facilitate the

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contract had been completed, the herder was free to seek other employment and the United States government allowed the herder to apply for permanent residency if they desired it.



Basque sheepherders. Nevada, al about 1910. Photo: Nevada Historical Society

In 1960, the California Range Association established the Western Range Association, which would function at the national level. Joshe Mendiburu was the President and the principal representative was Germán Pizarro, with the goal of recruiting Basques to come to the American west and work as sheepherders. The Western Range Association negotiated with the central government of Spain and established an office at the American consulate in Bilbao from which they recruited hundreds of Basques. Between 1957 and 1970, the Range Association received 5,495 applications for sheepherding and 95% of those were from Basques from Nafarroa and Bizkaia. However, as the economy of the Basque Country improved, fewer Basques wanted or needed to emigrate for economic reasons and the Western Range Association began to recruit sheepherders in Peru (1971) and in Mexico (1973). During the 1960s, sheepherders were paid an average of \$200 per month for inexperienced males, and \$300 per month for experienced workers. During the 1970s the closing of Basque immigration related to sheepherding resulted from three major factors: competitive salaries in the Basque Country itself, cheaper labor from South America, and an overall decrease in the demand for sheepherders in the United States.

In 1966, there were approximately 1200 Basque sheepherders working in the United States, and by 1976 there were only 106 Basques with sheepherding contracts. Basques dominated the sheep industry in the United States for almost exactly one hundred years beginning with the establishment of the Altube brothers' Spanish Ranch in Nevada in 1873. By the 1970s, most of the second and third generation Basques had moved into different industries, occupations, and professions, leaving behind agricultural labor. However, Basque ethnic identity in the United States remains tied to the collective past they share of sheepherding as the door opener to the United States, and even those Basques whose families never were a part of the sheep business still preserve this significant aspect to the history of Basque development in the West.

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